

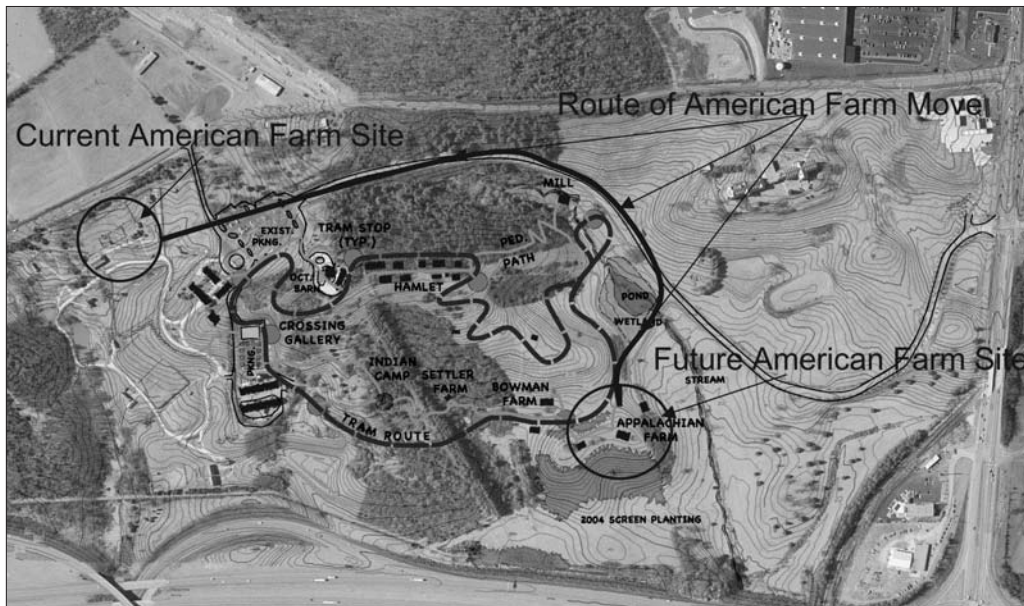


AMERICAN FRONTIER CULTURE FOUNDATION

Bringing the Past to Life

Volume 22, No. 2 Fall 2007

Museum on the Move



When you visit the Frontier Culture Museum during the next several months you will see temporary signs entitled “Museum of the Move” describing the exhibit developments visible around the museum. Of particular interest in October, the museum will literally “pick up” and move intact a prominent exhibit to its new home near the pond visible along George M. Cochran Drive, the museum’s entryway.

The American Farm, constructed in the early-19th century by German descendent John Barger, has welcomed patrons since the museum opened in 1988. It represents a period of Valley history when the cultures that settled the region had lived side-by-side for several generations.

When the museum created its long-range master plan in 2002 it envisioned two distinct collections of exhibits representing the Old World and America, with the latter developing on the museum’s expansion site between its parking area and Richmond Road. The various American exhibits will interpret the settlement and development of the western frontier.

The American Farm will become the second exhibit to occupy the museum’s expansion site, joining the late-18th century Bowman House dedicated in 2005. In time, the museum will augment the American exhibits with an American-Indian encampment, an early-American fortified homestead, and an early-American settlement (see article on page 3).

The ground on which the American Farm currently rests will not sit idle very long. Shortly after the move is complete the museum will prepare the site for its upcoming West African exhibit. It will join the German, Irish, and English farms in interpreting the primary Old World cultures that settled the Valley of Virginia.

The relocation of the American Farm, to be undertaken by the same firm that moved the Cape Hatteras lighthouse in 1999, will be a marvel of modern engineering. Please visit the museum’s web site (www.frontiermuseum.org) and watch your newspapers for events and other opportunities to experience this move for yourself.

Fundraising Nearly Complete for West African Exhibit Construction

Through the contributions of many individuals, private foundations, corporations, and the Commonwealth, the American Frontier Culture Foundation has successfully secured the majority of resources necessary to support the construction of the museum’s West African exhibit. The museum will break ground on the exhibit shortly after it relocates its existing American Farm.

The Foundation is particularly pleased to have received generous commitments from a private Richmond foundation, the Dominion Foundation, the Marietta McNeill Morgan & Samuel Tate Morgan, Jr. Foundation, the Richard & Caroline T. Gwathmey Memorial Trust, and the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities. The final step in the fundraising process is to complete the matching requirements for the \$25,000 challenge grant from the Marietta McNeill Morgan & Samuel Tate Morgan, Jr. Foundation, of which the Foundation has already secured over \$16,000.

“We are very pleased to partner with the Frontier Culture Museum and its newest living history exhibit showcasing African-

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Maricia Capps Begins Term as Foundation President

The American Frontier Culture Foundation, incorporated in 1982 to support the advancement of the Frontier Culture Museum, is governed by a Board of Directors, from whom a President is elected to provide leadership of the board for a two-year term. The Foundation recently celebrated the many accomplishments of Mrs. Peggy Sheets, who provided remarkable leadership of the board during her tenure as President, and welcomed its new President, Mrs. Maricia Capps, as she presided at the Foundation's September board meeting.

"My goal for this year is to involve each board member in our growth and progress through committee support and participation in our programs and campaigns," stated President Capps, "and to make it so much fun that it spills over into the community and beyond."

Prior to her retirement in 2000 and subsequent move to Virginia, Maricia Capps founded and led her own commercial interior design and interior construction businesses, Maricia Capps and Associates, Inc. and MCA Construction Company, in Dallas, Texas. ServiceMaster Ltd acquired both firms in 1995 and appointed Mrs. Capps to the positions of Senior Vice President and Managing Officer of their Interior Design Department in the FDS architectural firm (a ServiceMaster-owned

company).

Mrs. Capps earned a BS in Interior Design from Michigan State University and was accredited NCIDQ. She served on the boards of the Irving Symphony League, Irving Chamber of Commerce, American Society of Interior Designers, Commercial Real Estate Women (board officer), March of Dimes of Dallas, and the International Facilities Managers Association, the latter of which recognized Mrs. Capps with a national award in 1993. She was also a member of the Society for Marketing Professional Services, Interior Business Designers, and the Building Owners and Managers Association.

Mrs. Capps and her husband, Ron Capps, who have two grown daughters and two grandchildren, purchased and restored a historic home in the farming country surrounding Staunton where they enjoy their retirement and dedicate their time to the American Frontier Culture Foundation and the community of Staunton and Augusta County.

In addition to electing a new President, the Foundation's board also welcomed several new Directors, including Mr. John Dod, Mr. Jay Russell, Mrs. Jerry Lynn Shipplett, Mr. Butch Smiley, Mr. Lowrie Tucker, and Mr. Jeff Wood, each of whom will serve the Foundation for four-year terms.

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Montgomery Springs: An Early-American Settlement

Part 1

From its earliest days, the Frontier Culture Museum focused its interpretation on individual farms and farm life. As the museum advances its master plan it is taking steps to expand not only its farm exhibits, but also its interpretive focus by directing its attention to the development of rural settlements in the Shenandoah Valley.

The research for this phase of museum development sought to address several issues, including the defining characteristics of early settlements and the many factors that caused them to emerge. Some of the more recent scholarship for these and other related topics came together in the book After the Backcountry: Rural Life in the Great Valley of Virginia, edited by Kenneth E. Koons and Warren R. Hofstra. In addition, a research paper entitled "Between Daily Life and Eastern Markets: Valley of Virginia Villages in 1850," prepared in 2000 for the Frontier Culture Museum by Jennifer R. Breslin, then a Master of Arts candidate in Architectural History at the University of Virginia, has been a good source of information for museum staff. (After the Backcountry and "Between Daily Life and Eastern Markets" are available in the museum's library.)

The Valley in 1850 was "town rich" in comparison to the Tidewater and Piedmont where even county seats failed to grow into substantial places until later in their history. This might have

been due to the fact that the Tidewater and Piedmont land holdings were larger and that plantations tended to have their own services and to provide them to their neighbors who did not.

Additional factors, such as the mixed agricultural industry of the Valley, quality of transportation to various ports, and the changing demographics of the Valley's population, played important roles in the speed and nature of settlement development. By the 1850's, the "upper Valley" counties of Rockingham, Augusta, and Rockbridge experienced the highest rate of growth in the Valley since the late-18th century.

What emerged from this research seems to suggest that settlements began with a "farm" and advanced through the categories of "hamlet," "village," and "town." By the middle of the 19th century the known places in the upper Valley counties included 4 towns, 30 villages, and 36 hamlets, the latter of which was defined by a population of 20 to 150 residents and, when combined with towns, represented the majority of the region's settlement growth. The lack of growth in the more urban category of "town" reflects many factors, including the region's continued adherence to a grain-based economy that did not require the additional

support provided through greater urbanization.

This research, reproduced in only the most modest of detail for this newsletter, led museum officials to conclude that the development of a settlement exhibit would be best interpreted as an 1850's hamlet. In honor of the essential role played by Eric Montgomery (d.2003), former director of the Ulster-American Folk Park, museum Trustee Emeritus, and the person responsible for initiating the effort that led to the creation of the Frontier Culture Museum, the museum's future hamlet will be known as Montgomery Springs.

As the typical hamlet of the upper Valley supported an agricultural economy, the cornerstone of most hamlets would have been a merchant mill, as opposed to a grist mill. The latter would have been operated by a farmer for processing his own grain and that of his neighbors, while a merchant mill developed as an independent business that purchased grain from farmers and sold flour on the open market. The current focus of planning for Montgomery Springs is the development of a merchant mill.

(Subsequent newsletters will delve more deeply into the museum's efforts to construct a working merchant mill based on historic examples, design a complete hamlet, and honor the legacy of Eric Montgomery).

Museum News

- ❖ As of the end of the fiscal year on June 30, 2007, the Frontier Culture Museum celebrated a 10% increase in paid museum visitation over the prior year.
- ❖ The Discovery Channel visited the museum during the week of July 23 to film a duel behind the Irish farm. This clip will air in their documentary on the history of weaponry. Once the Discovery Channel releases the date for airing this documentary the museum will announce the date on their web site (www.frontiermuseum.org).
- ❖ The History Channel visited the museum earlier this year to film the Irish farm for an episode on the history of the Ulster Scots immigration to America and the Appalachian mountains. This episode aired on September 23.
- ❖ Travel Radio International visited the museum to broadcast on-site earlier this year.
- ❖ WCVB-Boston (ABC) included the Frontier Culture Museum in their "Places to See" episode in May.
- ❖ The Frontier Culture Museum was featured this year in Virginia Views, Old Town Crier (Alexandria), and Traditional Masonry (Eugene, OR).

The museum will also be featured in an upcoming issue of Motor Coach Magazine.

- ❖ Karen Becker (Interpretive Supervisor) & Gigi Kelly (interpreter) have assumed the roles of co-editors of KUDZU, the newsletter of the Southeast region of ALHFAM (Association for Living History, Farm and Agricultural Museums). Karen is also a member of the Board of Directors of ALHFAM's Southeast region.
- ❖ At the end of each month, museum staff vote for their choice of Employee of the Month. They then select the Employee of the Quarter from the three monthly recipients. Finally, they select the Employee of the Year from the four quarterly recipients: Marcus Buchanan (Livestock Manager), Elaine Lefingwell (Costume Assistant), Mark Mannette (interpreter), and Gigi Kelly (interpreter). On July 25 the museum announced that the Employee of the Year, as selected by his peers, was Marcus Buchanan. We congratulate Marcus and thank him for his hard work and dedication to the Frontier Culture Museum.

FRONTIER ANNUAL FUND

Contributions to the Frontier Annual Fund support many significant investments in the future of the Frontier Culture Museum. We extend our most heartfelt appreciation to the individuals, businesses, and foundations who helped us accomplish so much during our 2005-2006 fiscal year.

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Fundraising continued from page 1

American History,” said William C. Hall, Jr., Vice President of Corporate Communications & Community Affairs and President of the Dominion Foundation. “As planning continues and construction gets underway, we hope this exhibit becomes a focal point for students and scholars to discover hands-on learning about one of our most important cultures.”

The development of the West African exhibit represents years of research conducted by museum staff in conjunction with African history scholars in America and Nigeria. They concluded that the Igbo people of southeastern Nigeria represented the predominant African culture brought to Virginia during the height of the Atlantic slave trade. Consequently, the museum will feature the culture and daily lives of the Igbo people in their new exhibit.

“The Igbo people are one of the oldest civilizations in Africa south of the Savanna,”

notes Umebe N. Onyejekwe, a Nigerian cultural official and consultant to the museum. “The Frontier Culture Museum’s exhibit is the first of its kind in the world and is generating much positive interest in Nigeria among the politicians, the Federal government agencies which have already agreed to assist with the project, the academic community, the traditional rulers, and the general populace.”

The museum will also create a wide range of educational programs featuring the new exhibit. “Experiencing something is so much more effective than reading about it,” commented Karen Duvel, 8th grade civics teacher at Riverbend Middle School in Loudoun County. “This will give students a chance to explore the similarities and differences of a way of life other than their own. Understanding customs and traditions helps to lead the way toward tolerance. There are so many ways for teachers to connect this experience to just about any subject.”



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